

# COUNTY OF YORK

## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** February 20, 2004 (BOS Mtg. 3/2/04)

**TO:** York County Board of Supervisors

**FROM:** James O. McReynolds, County Administrator

**SUBJECT:** Route 17 Property Improvement Grant Program

The Industrial Development Authority (IDA) was tasked by the Board of Supervisors to develop a plan to improve the appearance and economic viability of the Route 17 business corridor. In response to that direction, the IDA formed a Route 17 Revitalization Committee (Committee) comprised of County staff, Route 17 business owners, Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) staff, and representatives from the following organizations: York County Chamber of Commerce, Planning Commission, Master Gardeners, and the Beautification Committee. In August of 2003 the Committee completed a final draft of the Route 17 Corridor Revitalization, Recommendations for Action, a comprehensive report assessing the current condition of the corridor and presenting 13 action options to improve the situation. The action options were broken into three categories: Business Incentives, County Initiatives, and Regulatory Reform. The report was presented to the Board in September 2003 at a work session and subsequently modified to reflect the Board's input. The IDA formally adopted the report in November 2003, and staff began implementing selected action options. These initial steps included landscaping in medians, shoulders and other rights-of-way areas, and adding Block Number signs at major intersections. One of the key action options in the Business Incentive category is a Property Improvement Grant Program (PIGP). The details of that initiative have been finalized and are now being presented to the Board for authorization.

The proposed PIGP is an important action item in the overall revitalization plan as it provides a significant financial incentive to stimulate physical improvements in the corridor in a cohesive manner. This financial incentive is intended to improve the functionality and aesthetics of existing businesses. In addition to offering matching funds for improvements, the IDA will secure free design services that will be provided to participants at no cost. This service will help mesh private improvements with public initiatives and, when possible, implement recommendations from the Route 17 Cox Study (completed January, 1996). The PIGP offers applicants a broad array of projects to choose from, including building exterior improvements of all types, signage upgrades, landscape/hardscape enhancements, and demolition. The IDA will select a subcommittee from the Route 17 Revitalization Committee to review all projects. The IDA proposes to formally establish this program review committee at its March meeting.

The PIGP offers dollar for dollar matching grants up to a maximum of \$20,000. If an applicant chooses to use its own designers, these soft costs will be matched up to a maximum of 6 percent of the total project cost. All work must be completed within one year of approval, and reimbursement will be made only after satisfactory completion and inspection of the project. Applicants must provide copies of all receipts/invoices and pertinent federal, state, and county permits. Any commercial property fronting Route 17 will qualify for the program, including residential structures that are being converted entirely to commercial applications. The committee will also consider applications from properties that don't have Route 17 frontage but are highly visible from the roadway. Any project that has already been initiated prior to the formal start date of the PIGP will not be considered. All applications will be considered on a rolling basis and will be evaluated using the following general criteria:

- Aesthetic quality of the project and its design;
- Visual prominence and potential impact on attractiveness of the Route 17 Corridor;
- Conformance of the project to corridor objectives, such as landscape coordination with median improvements, VDOT entrance closure plans, reduced or ground mounted signage, and improvements in accordance with the Route 17 Cox Study.

The Program Review Committee will have the right to reject any proposals that do not conform to PIGP objectives. The grants will be awarded as long as funds remain.

It is proposed that \$250,000 be provided for this program from the Board's Economic Development Fund. At this level of funding, with an average total project cost \$25,000, 20 properties could be significantly improved. This level of activity would have a very positive impact on the corridor. These funds have already been appropriated for economic development, and it is proposed that they be transferred to the IDA's capital fund for program implementation.

If the program were approved, applications would begin being accepted on April 5, 2004. This would allow adequate time to secure an architectural design consultant and advertise the program. A landscape design consultant has already been retained. A comprehensive promotional campaign will be developed in conjunction with the County's Public Information Office. This campaign will include, at a minimum, mass mailings of program flyers, newspaper coverage, use of all County media venues, and exposure via the York County Community Network.

Attached to this memorandum are PIGP Program Guidelines, Grant Application Form, Owner's Consent Form, and summary information on similar municipal programs from across the country.

Recommendation:

The PIGP is an important element in the Route 17 Corridor Revitalization Plan and has the potential to effect very positive economic and aesthetic improvements. I recommend your approval of this program and authorization to transfer \$250,000 from your Economic Development Fund to the IDA's capital fund to support this initiative. This can be accomplished by adopting proposed Resolution R04-35.

Noel/3318

Attachments